

# **MFA Graduate Project**

## ***Cuando la tierra se parte en dos***

*Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts in Photography*

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## Abstract

*Cuando la tierra se parte en dos* examines how deliberate and catastrophic forms of war and commerce disrupt the affective and cultural attachments that bind people to a place, and how these ruptures are rendered visible through the juxtaposition between archival imagery and my photographic practice. Inspired by critical spatial theory (Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space, 1974) the project incorporates archival photographs from the Spanish Civil War to activate latent memory within contemporary suburban and natural landscapes. Drawing found telegrams from the war, Spanish poems from authors such as Federico García Lorca or Miguel Hernández from that period (1930-1945) and quotes from different academics, (like David Harvey or Lorenzo Veracini) are included in the sequences between the photographs to create a dialogue between landscapes that share a history of control, displacement, and forgetting. Positioned as an autoethnographic research, it approaches landscapes as both material topographies and repositories of lived experience, as sites where identity, memory, and belonging are continuously negotiated and re-signified.



Figure 1

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## Historical Context

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was an armed conflict that lasted three years and was followed by a forty-year fascist dictatorship, Francisco Franco was the dictator (1939-1975). This conflict goes beyond my parents and grandparents' generations and permeated Spanish culture in multiple ways, affecting generations such as mine, who did not live through those years. It was deemed to have ended during the “democratic transition”, when Spain's current Constitution (1978) was written and the democratic institutions that now govern our political system were consolidated.



Figure 2

This generational effect is a clear example of how the remnants of the dictatorship still exist today. However, the transition also concealed a social phenomenon that is rarely discussed in Spain. Conservative thinkers, such as Pérez-Reverte, have recently started portraying the Civil War as a conflict in which everyone lost. While it is true that, in a civil war, brothers and sisters fight one another and all families endure loss, the reality is that a specific social class emerged victorious during those dark years of our recent history. This class, made up of politicians, businessmen, and high-ranking religious figures like Manuel Fraga, decided the direction Spain would take in its new democratic era. For this reason, left-wing intellectuals, such as David Uclés, challenge the idea that “we all lost” the war (ElPais.es, 2026).

Wherever one looks in the Spanish landscape, one finds traces of the dictatorship and the war, stories that have never been told or have been forgotten, due to the taboo of talking about the Civil

War. The story I aim to recount and remember is that of my hometown, Navalcarnero. Located 30 kilometers southwest of Madrid, it witnessed the second deadliest battle of the Spanish Civil War in July 1937. The Battle of Brunete was an offensive launched by government forces in an attempt to create chaos among Franco's troops and to buy time while awaiting international aid. My hometown, Navalcarnero, once stood at the border between the two Spains. It held strategic value due to its proximity to Madrid, as it does today, though for very different reasons.



Figure 3

Before the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and the subsequent global crisis, large sums of money were invested into Navalcarnero and nearby towns for new residential and commercial developments. The availability of cheap land in an underdeveloped area near Madrid's industrial suburbs made it an attractive opportunity. When the market collapsed, the flow of money ceased. After years of corruption and speculation, Navalcarnero became "the most indebted municipality in the country" (ElEconomista.es, 2017), with entire neighborhoods left as abandoned construction sites. It was only when plans for a new airport to serve Madrid, located merely ten minutes away from Navalcarnero, were announced that I came to understand and once again see my hometown as the border of.

## Artistic Intention

For decades, my parents' generation (roughly 1960-1970) avoided discussing the conflict. The education system encouraged forgetting. Focusing instead on the future and on the idea of unity as a people. However, I find it impossible to build unity upon rules written by the oppressors. This is where my generation (Millennials and Gen Z) comes into play. We are the future of a buried past, and the current media and political class is attempting to write a new story without acknowledging the previous chapter. This creates clear cultural and social problems, which motivate me the most in undertaking this project. My work positions itself within that future, “a future of understanding, peace, and well-being” (La raíz, 5:14) (values whose foundations are so fragile that they can hardly sustain themselves).

Having come to understand the history that forms the foundation of my origins, I set out on a path towards comprehension and awareness rooted in acknowledging and remembering history, rather than burying and forgetting a dark past. However, Spain's tourism based economy and cultural situation compelled me to seek resources elsewhere, which led me to Canada. Upon arriving here, I aimed to understand the history of this land through photography, yet I soon realized that what the camera captured was only the façade of a hidden story. It is within this context that my photographic practice in Montreal unfolds, as a search for the underlying pillars that shape the society and space in which I now live. Through urban explorations, I have gradually been mapping that façade, and only now am I beginning to see what lies within. *Cuando la tierra se parte en dos* (When the land splits in two) seeks to discover what lies in those cracks of the façade while reminding us the importance of understanding where we come from.



Figure 4

*Cuando la tierra se parte en dos* consists of four series of images. The first one is a series of photographic archives from the Biblioteca Nacional in Spain. These archives are photographs taken during the Civil War period (1933-1936) in areas close to Navalcarnero. The second series of images are black and white photographs taken by me in Navalcarnero, in the year 2024. The third series of color pictures are photographs taken in Montreal and around by me, between 2024 and 2025. The fourth set features scans of self-made telegram-style quotes and poems written by a variety of authors related to the themes addressed in this exhibition. Furthermore, all these images on the wall trace a line that corresponds to the geographical limit of Navalcarnero, adding conceptual weight by surrounding the public and giving a stronger sense of continuity.

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## Installation pictures

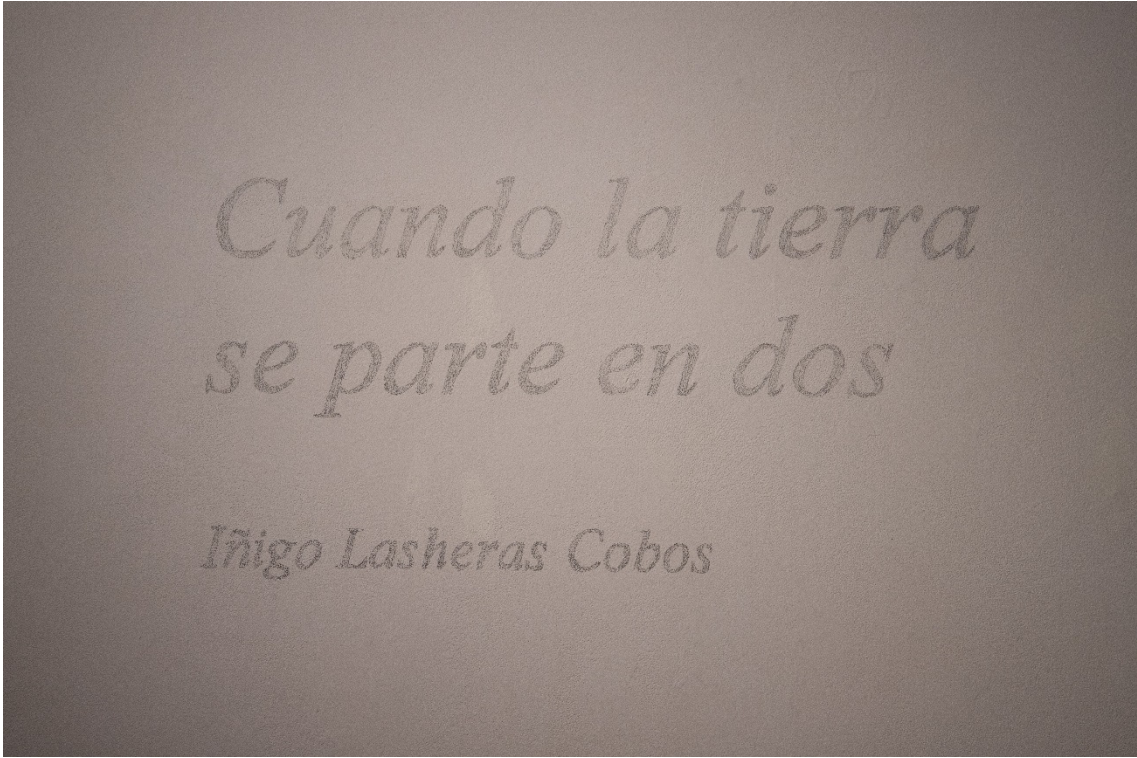












All installation photographs taken by Iñigo Lasheras Cobos